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SUBJECT: HATOYAMA APOLOGIZES FOR LINKING HIMSELF TO AL-QAIDA

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Justice Minister Kunio Hatoyama publicly retracted his claim of having a friend who is an al-Qaida member and told reporters he in fact did not have prior knowledge of the October 2002 Bali bombings. Hatoyama explained that a "friend of a friend" is a member of al-Qaida - whom he does not actually know -- and stated that he made the remarks to justify the need to tighten Japanese immigration controls. Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura publicly rebuked Hatoyama, but stopped short of taking any more serious action. This gaffe tracks with Hatoyama's reputation of being prone to careless and poorly considered public statements. End Summary.

2.(U) Justice Minister Kunio Hatoyama, after being publicly chastised by Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura, apologized on October 30 for making a statement indirectly linking himself to an al-Qaida terrorist involved in the October 2002 Bali bombings. During a speech at the Foreign Correspondent's Club of Japan on October 29, Hatoyama, in a bid to justify Japan's new immigration policy of fingerprinting foreigners, stated that he had "a friend" who was a member of al-Qaida and had entered Japan using fake passports. He also said that he had been advised by a friend against visiting Bali before the bombing because it was being targeted for an attack. He retracted his comments about receiving advance warning of the Bali terrorist attack at a news conference the same day, stating that it was a friend who had been given advance warning about the pending attack. Hatoyama explained that it was the "friend of a friend" who was a member of al-Qaida and said that his friend told him about it three or four months after the bombing. He noted that he had not met the person claiming to be an al-Qaida member, and did not know about the specific plans for the Bali bombing before it took place.

13. (U) Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura chastised Hatoyama for claiming to be friends with an al-Qaida member and told the press "It is very regrettable that the remark gave the wrong impression that Japan's Justice Minister knows such terrorists." He added that it was a careless remark and said he discussed the matter with Hatoyama before the Cabinet meeting on October 30. After being rebuked by Machimura, Hatoyama apologized to Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda for "causing various concerns," but later defended his initial remarks, and reiterated that a friend had indeed told him that a suspected al-Qaida member had entered Japan multiple times using false passports, and said Japanese immigration officials were unaware of this. Hatoyama told reporters he made the al-Qaida statement to justify the need for tightening Japanese immigration controls.

Comment

14. (C) On November 20 Japan will begin collecting biometric data, including fingerprints from foreigners aged 16 and over when they enter Japan, as part of plans tighten security at points of entry. Hatoyama -- who has a well-earned reputation for gaffes -- was delivering the speech to garner support for Japan's new immigration control system. On the day of the speech, Hatoyama also expressed opposition to the pro-immigration stance of his predecessor Jinen Nagase, who pushed for using foreign workers to make up for labor shortfalls due to Japan's aging population and declining birth rate.

15. (C) Hatoyama further brought trouble down on himself at the October 31 House of Representatives Committee on Judicial Affairs meeting, when he said he used to be "wined and dined" by the United States Department of Defense every month when he served as private secretary to former prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, according to the press. He made the comment during a discussion on Japan's intelligence gathering, and later stated that "what he meant to say was that the Pentagon spends money on intelligence gathering and Japan should also devote substantial resources for diplomacy and defense."
SCHIEFFER